

RECOVERED TREASURES: GREAT FILMS FROM WORLD ARCHIVES

January 15–February 20, 2011

FOLLOW THE FLEET

Sunday, February 6, 4:30 p.m.

1936, 118 mins.

Introduced by Rajendra Roy, The Museum of Modern Art. Restored by Museum of Modern Art.

Directed by Mark Sandrich. Written by Allan G. Scott and Dwight Taylor. Based on the play *Shore Leave* by Hubert Osborne. Produced by Pandro S. Berman. Photographed by Dave Abel. Edited by Henry Berman.

Original Music by Irving Berlin and Max Steiner. Choreography by Fred Astaire and Hermes Pan.

Principal Cast: Fred Astaire (as Bake Baker), Ginger Rogers (Sherry Martin), Randolph Scott (Bilge Smith), Harriet Hilliard (Connie Martin), Astrid Allwyn (Iris Manning), Ray Mayer (Dopey Williams), Lucille Ball (Kitty Collins), Harry Beresford (Captain Hickey), Betty Grable (Trio Singer).

From review in ***Variety***, February 26, 1936:

Fred Astaire, the Chris Columbus for the boys and girls on the hoof, hasn't missed yet. And *Follow the Fleet* follows his others around the bases, keeping the record clean. With Ginger Rogers again opposite, and the Irving Berlin music to dance to and sing, Astaire once more legs himself and his picture into the big-time entertainment class.

All the star team's dancing efforts are honeys. Miss Rogers in this one goes beyond the role of dancing vis-à-vis for Astaire and emerges as a corking stepper in her own right. Her assimilation of the Astaire method now permits wider scope in the routines, and that Astaire has taken advantage of this is notable in all three of their doubles. In a rehearsal dance on a boat deck they really go eccentric. There is no better comedy than dancing comedy, and this is dancing comedy at its best.

Excerpt from essay "Fellini's ***Ginger and Fred***: Postmodern Simulation Meets Hollywood Romance," by Millicent Marcus:

Mark Sandrich's *Follow the Fleet* (1936), starring Astaire and Rogers, is a powerful example of how spectacle can modify performers' lives. It tells the story of two dancing partners reunited after a separation of several years, who put on a benefit show and thus succeed in reconciling several pairs of lovers. By making the spectacle itself the agent of plot resolution, *Follow the Fleet* reflects Astaire's own insistence that dance be an organic part of the narrative, advancing and promoting it in significant ways:

"I think the audience always slumps...even more in movies than on stage-when they hear an obvious dance cue, and both the picture and the dance seem to lose some of their continuity. Each dance ought to spring somehow out of character or situation, otherwise, it is simply a vaudeville act."

In the aftermath of the show-within-the-film, Sherry Martin (played by Rogers) is convinced by the triumph of their professional reunion that her partnership with 'Bake' Baker (played by Astaire) should be continued offstage. The climatic routine, 'Let's Face the Music and Dance,' is itself a performance within a performance within a performance: the inner dance is surrounded by a pantomimed narrative, which the choreography addresses and resolves. In this frame story, an

elegant gambler who has just squandered his fortune meets a desperate society lady about to leap to her death. Rather than self-destruct, the two decide to 'face the music and dance.' Thus *Follow the Fleet* comprises several layers of embedded spectacles, each of which remedies the interpersonal dilemmas of the surrounding narrative in a triumphant affirmation of art's power to intervene in life.

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